Client’s Right to Give Informed Consent

One of the best ways to protect the rights of clients is to develop procedures to help them make informed choices. **Informed consent** involves the right of clients to be informed about their therapy and to make autonomous decisions pertaining to it. The main purpose of informed consent is to increase the chances that the client will become involved, educated, and a willing participant in his or her therapy. Mental health professionals are required by their ethics codes to disclose to clients the risks, benefits, and alternatives to proposed treatment. The intent of an **informed consent document** is to define boundaries and clarify the nature of the therapeutic relationship. The goal of the informed consent process is to give clients adequate and continuous information so that they may anticipate what they will be asked to consent to in treatment (Wineburgh, 1998).

Informed consent entails a balance between telling clients too much and telling them too little. Although most professionals agree on the ethical principle that it is crucial to provide clients with information about the therapeutic relationship, the manner in which this is done in practice varies considerably among therapists. It is a mistake to overwhelm clients with too much detailed information at once, but it is also a mistake to withhold important information that clients need if they are to make wise choices about their therapy program.

Professionals have a responsibility to their clients to make reasonable disclosure of all significant facts, the nature of the procedure, and some of the more probable consequences and difficulties. All clients have the right to have treatment explained to them. The process of therapy is not so mysterious that it cannot be explained in a way that clients can comprehend how it works. It is essential that clients give their consent with understanding. It is the responsibility of professionals to assess the client’s level of understanding and to promote the client’s free choice. Professionals need to avoid subtly coercing clients to cooperate with a therapy program to which they are not freely consenting. Generally, informed consent requires that the client be competent, have knowledge